

The Best Heart-Healthy Foods: Simple Swaps for a Stronger Heart

Healthy eating can lower the risk of factors tied to heart disease, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood sugar and obesity. Fortunately, eating well can be as simple as swapping in similar but healthier foods. Let's look at ways to reduce your risk by adding heart-healthy foods to your diet.

Shop the Rainbow. Fruits and vegetables are full of essential nutrients for heart health, including antioxidants that help fight inflammation and may also prevent blood clots, both of which play a role in heart disease. Antioxidants come in different types, which are typically associated with different colors. This makes it easy to ensure you're getting the full spectrum of benefits. Simply fill your plate with the colors of the rainbow.

Choose Healthy Grains. Whole grains are high on the list of heart-healthy foods. They contain fiber, which helps lower blood sugar and cholesterol, and keeps us full, plus a whole raft of other nutrients. When shopping for bread, look for products that contain 100% whole grains. Aim for one to two servings of whole grains per day. Brown rice, quinoa and barley are all healthy choices too.

Go Lean on Protein. Protein is an important part of a healthy diet; your body uses protein for healthy growth and to repair cells. The key is choosing leaner proteins. Meats like chicken, turkey and fish are generally better choices in this regard than beef. Beans, tofu and nuts are other protein sources that do not contain saturated fats, and they're packed with other heart-healthy vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals. Eggs often get a bad rap because they contain cholesterol, but they are high in protein, low in calories and offer healthy antioxidants, fatty acids, vitamins and minerals.

Check Labels for Sodium and Sugar. Sometimes foods that sound healthy contain high amounts of sodium and sugar, turning a good thing into a not-so-good one. Salt raises blood pressure and sugar adds calories that can put extra strain on the body. Most sodium in our diet occurs naturally in food, so check labels carefully when buying prepared foods.

Smart Dairy Swaps. Dairy foods are a good source of protein and supply calcium, potassium, magnesium and other heart-healthy nutrients. However, many dairy foods — including full-fat cheese and milk — are high in saturated fats that play a major role in raising the risk of heart disease. To get the best parts of dairy foods without so much saturated fat, try swapping whole milk dairy with part-skim or low-fat versions.

Source:

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